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A SERMON

PREACHED BY

THE LORD BISHOP OF LICHFIELD

IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

ON TUESDAY, JUNE 3D, 1856,

ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY,

On the occasion of a Festival holden by the permission of the Dean and Chapter in order to set the example of Collections in Churches in aid of the Society, the customary Queen's Letter in its favour having been this year for the first time refused.

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” *Hosea* iv. 6.

It is a very striking and painful, and at the same time instructive, picture which the prophet whose pregnant words I have just brought before you, and his contemporary prophets, exhibit of the religious and moral state of the people to whom they were sent. For in exact conformity with the declaration in my text is that of another and a greater prophet, writing about the same time, and upon the same subject: “Therefore,” says Isaiah, in a chapter with which our Church has made us familiar, “my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge.” The two prophets, speaking in the name of that Almighty One whose commission they bear, and with whom to purpose is to accomplish, and the future is as the present, and having clearly before their eyes the vision of their country's impending desolation, here, as elsewhere, represent that which was yet only approaching as having already come: “My people are destroyed—my people *are gone* into captivity.” But the point which must at all times concern us most in the passages before us, and in others to the like effect in the prophetic pages, and to which, on the present occasion, I have a particular inducement to invite your attention, is the cause of that prophetic denouncement, briefly, indeed, but emphatically stated,

—“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;” “therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge.”

There is something remarkable, and it may at first sight seem startling, in this. Here is a people separated and set apart from all the other nations of the world to be God's own peculiar people, the depositaries of His revelation; the witnesses of His miracles; the objects of His especial favour and care; directed by His law; brought nigh to Him by His ordinances; and yet, notwithstanding these extraordinary privileges, declared by Him to be “gone into captivity,” and “destroyed, for lack of *knowledge*.”

We may well then inquire what the ignorance was, through which a people, to whom it was given to know so much, perished; for the inquiry nearly concerns ourselves, who, like them, are God's “peculiar” people; like them, have the light of God's revelations to guide us; like them, draw nigh to Him in His “house of prayer;” like them, have received signal deliverances, and manifold mercies, as a nation, and as a Church, at His hands.

The opening passage of the chapter from which my text has been taken will supply an answer to the inquiry, and clearly illustrate the character of that ignorance: “The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out Therefore shall the land mourn.” That want then of the “knowledge of God” in Israel, against which the word of His indignation was directed, was in close connexion with the want of truth and of mercy, and had its natural fruits in “swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery.” It was the ignorance of those who (as St. Paul describes this same people in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Romans) “rested in the law, and made their boast of God, and knew His will, being instructed out of the law, and yet, through breaking the law of which they made their boast, dishonoured God.” It was the ignorance of those who deceived themselves into a forgetfulness of the practical purposes for which their knowledge had been given them: such as was that, in earlier days, of “the sons of Eli,” of whom it is written, that they were “sons of Belial,”—“they knew not the Lord:” they knew Him not, that is to say, in their hearts and lives, being ungodly and licentious men; though they could not but know Him in His name, and in His worship; for they ministered to Him day by day in His tabernacle.

Again, the character of the knowledge which is the opposite of this ignorance, is not less manifestly laid open to us, both as to what it is not, and as to what it is. It is not merely human knowledge; for according to the estimation of the Scriptures, to know all things human, and to have no acquaintance with things divine, is but "vanity and vexation of spirit;" it is not the merely formal knowledge of things divine; for we have just seen that the "form of godliness" may, both in nations and individuals, be altogether separate from "the power thereof;" it is not merely speculative knowledge, even though the subjects thus known should be high, and, in a sense, spiritual; for of such knowledge the same Scriptures tell us, that it "puffeth up," and "edifieth" not. But the knowledge upon which the written oracles of God set a value, and which can be obtained only from a right use of their teaching, is the knowledge of God's perfections, in order to the reverential imitation of them; it is the knowledge of God's providence, for the purpose of a faithful reliance upon its wisdom, and its goodness; it is the knowledge of God's commandments, to the end that they may be kept, and that "in the keeping of them there" may be "great reward;" it is the knowledge of God's terrors, that they may cause "men" to "depart from evil;" it is the knowledge of God's promises, that they may be the sure ground of hope, and the never-failing source of comfort; it is, in a word, the knowledge of religious truths, with a view to the illustration of them by a religious practice. It was of such knowledge that the wise man spoke, when he said: "My son, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God; then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path," "that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous."

But further, when we consider this knowledge, as we are bound to consider it, with especial reference to our Christian privileges, and our Christian duties, it is the knowledge of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified;" of the pardon, and peace, and eternal life, which He has purchased with no less a price than His own blood for penitent believers; of the intercession which He makes for them; of the grace by which He guides, and sustains, and comforts them, in order that they may show themselves sensible of the obligations under which they are thereby laid to be "unto Him a peculiar people,

zealous of good works." It was to the spreading abroad of this knowledge that the teaching of our Lord, and of His apostles, otherwise "unlearned and ignorant men" (as, with but one exception, they were), was ever directed. It was this that became the light and the ornament of their first followers. And it is this knowledge, brethren, which still sets the humblest possessor of it among us far above the most accomplished proficient in other knowledge, if his proficiency be without "understanding in the way of godliness," and unsanctified by "the wisdom that is from above." In a word, they who have this knowledge are uninstructed in nothing which it absolutely and indispensably concerns them to know; they who have it not are in a state of the most pitiable and perilous ignorance, whatever may be their other attainments, because their ignorance involves in it disobedience to the laws of an almighty and all-judging God.

As, then, brethren, it must needs be the soundest wisdom to secure this knowledge for ourselves, lest we be among those whom an apostle describes as "professing that they know God, but in works denying Him;" so must it be the truest charity to communicate it to others. And it is this last-named duty, of which the occasion of my being here to-day leads me earnestly to put you in remembrance.

That there are many, very many, around us, almost at our doors, who "go into captivity" and "are destroyed," because they have no such knowledge as that of which I have been speaking, is one of those sad truths to which we can none of us be strangers.

The two prophets indeed whose declarations, so exactly parallel to each other, I have brought before you, uttered them in relation to a *temporal* captivity, and a *carnal* destruction: but they may well be applied by us to that "everlasting destruction," which is the end of a *spiritual* captivity; the captivity which enslaves the soul, and the body with it, to the lusts and passions of a corrupt and unrenewed nature; the captivity which St. Paul described to the Romans as the effect of the law of sin warring in the members, and of which our Lord took solemn notice, when He said to the Jews, vainly boasting of their freedom from bondage (a boast which was untrue, both in a temporal and a spiritual sense), "Whosoever committeth sin"—lives in the habit of committing it—"is the servant (according to the original, the slave) of sin." But He at the same time pointed out the way of deliverance from that wretched servitude by declaring that they who would become His "disciples indeed,

should know the truth, and that the truth should set them free."

Ought we not, therefore, brethren, to think ourselves happy, and highly privileged, if He enables us in any measure (and which of us does He not enable in some measure?) to be His instruments in communicating the knowledge of this soul-emancipating truth to His and our brethren? for, as His brethren no less than as ours, He permits us, in wondrous condescension, nay, requires us, to think and speak of all the members of that great Christian family of which He is "the first-born," and the head. Ought we not readily and thankfully to avail ourselves of whatever means He may afford us of thus winning over new subjects to that "perfect law of liberty," "the glorious liberty of the children of God," which is laid down in His Gospel; to that "service" which (as our ever scriptural Book of Common Prayer describes it) "is perfect freedom"?

By a mysterious indeed, but most certain dispensation, God has been pleased to make mankind dependent upon one another for the supply of their spiritual, as well as of their temporal wants: and in both cases, when we "see our brother have need," we are bound not to "shut up our compassion from him." In both cases, "as every man hath received the gift," even so should we "minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Something certainly may be done by "every man" among us in his individual capacity for the discharge of this unquestionable, and, in its consequences, most momentous duty: but much, very much more, when we associate ourselves for this high and holy purpose with our fellow-Christians. An association, it is surely not presumptuous or vain to suppose, such as may be regarded with complacency, and even with joy, by the angels of God,—those pure and beneficent spirits who are "sent forth" (it is written) "to minister for them which shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. i. 14); and such as we may humbly trust cannot but be good and acceptable in the sight of Him "who" (it is written again) "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4), that is to say, to come to the knowledge of the truth, in order that thereby they may be saved.

It is on behalf of such an association, friends and brethren, that I have been asked by one in authority here to address you to-day. Would that my power to do this were equal to my will. But it may be that, in the case of a society whose principles cannot be

questioned (I am speaking to Churchmen) and of whose beneficial working the Church has had long and large experience, a plain and simple statement will be accepted by kindly-disposed hearers in the place of an eloquent and highly-wrought appeal. And sure I am that the "National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church" comes under that description. Its name is clearly expressive of its character and design. It is national in its aims and objects. It was established in order that it might be a national blessing, by imparting the benefits of education to that large class of our people from which they had hitherto been withheld: such a withholding being (as I have now neither need nor time to show) irreconcilable with the conclusions of reason, with the lessons of experience, with the whole tenor and spirit of Scripture.

But while the Society seeks to educate the poor, it seeks to educate them on certain principles; for its founders were persuaded, and its friends and supporters at this day are not less fully persuaded, and that, too, from a longer and larger experience, that an education not grounded upon fixed principles is profitless, and worse than profitless; or rather, that it is no education at all; a teaching but not a training; instruction unaccompanied with rules for using the lessons given rightly and beneficially; a communication of knowledge, but a knowledge altogether different from that of which I have been speaking to-day; a knowledge neither directed by wisdom, nor hallowed by religion; a knowledge, it may be, it too often has been, which, according to a prophet's description, makes men "wise to do evil," but not to do good.

What then were the principles upon which those wise and good men who founded this Society forty-five years ago (and many of whom it was my happiness to know) determined that its work should be done? They were the principles of that Church of which they were then, as we, I trust, are now, faithful, and affectionate, and grateful members; the Church in whose arms we were nursed, through whose ministrations we are fed with the bread of life; and in whose bosom we desire to be, as they have been, laid to rest; the Church which we love and venerate, because (without judging those who separate themselves from it) we honestly believe it to be scriptural in its doctrine, and primitive in its constitution; and whose formularies we regard as "sound words," to be used in the great work of general education, not to supersede, (God forbid!) but to illustrate, and explain, the Bible.

The institution of the National Society cannot but be regarded as an event of no common interest to Churchmen ; for it was the first movement on the part of the Church for the general education of the poor. To this institution therefore the many and great advances which have since been made in the same direction may with good reason, or rather must in fairness, be referred.

During a period, as I have said, of now little less than half a century, the Society has pursued its course faithfully and steadily, through "evil report and good report," in a spirit, not of party, but of moderation ; firmly adhering to its own principles, but not seeking to dictate to the judgments, or the consciences, of others.

But perhaps it may be well to go a little into particulars ; very familiar indeed to some who hear me, but with which others perhaps may not be so well acquainted.

First then as to the constitution of the Society.

Its affairs are administered by a mixed board of clergymen and laymen ; partly official, and including all the bishops of the Church ; partly elected by the subscribers at large, from among persons who, from their station and character, may well be supposed to have the cause of sound education at heart, and to be qualified to exercise a right judgment as to the best way of advancing it.

Next, as to the Society's objects. These, from its foundation, have been mainly three : first, the building of schools, and of houses for masters and mistresses ; secondly, the training of those masters and mistresses for their work ; and thirdly, the improvement of the means and machinery through which that work is carried on.

It is then a threefold labour of love in which the Society has been so long, and still is, engaged ; and largely (thanks be to Him from whom all works of wisdom and charity proceed, and under whom they prosper !) has that labour been blessed.

For school-building, the grants made directly by the Society amounted, at the close of last year, to all but 350,000*l.* ; of which amount, I may be permitted gratefully to say, about 30,000*l.* have come into my own diocese. That this application of the Society's funds has drawn forth from private bounty an expenditure of at least three times the amount cannot for a moment be doubted. A glorious exemplification surely of the Apostolical precept, "To provoke unto love, and to good works." And here it will be interesting to state, that the number of Church-schools believed to exist at the same time was 24,326 ; capable of containing above a million and a half of scholars. How large a proportion of these

schools would have had no existence, if there had been no National Society, I leave it to you to judge.

But what would schools be, what, I may say, have they been in times past, without well-qualified teachers to occupy them? teachers of whom we may have a good hope that they will give a really useful education to the children under their care, imparting to them such kinds and measures of instruction as may be helpful to them in their several occupations, and may at the same time raise their intellects and purify their tastes, and indispose them to sensual and brutalising habits; but above all, teachers who will train up the sons and daughters of the Church to be (God helping them) Christian men, and Christian women, and to show themselves worthy of the Church, by their faithful and peaceable discharge of their duties to God, and man. But such teachers and trainers we cannot hope to have, unless they have been themselves taught, and trained; unless they have had a moral, as well as an intellectual, preparation for their incalculably important calling, inferior in importance only to that of the parochial pastor.

Hence, to point to the second branch of the Society's usefulness, its Training Institutions: from which, during the last thirteen years, it has sent out more than 3000 masters and mistresses. Hence also the aid which, with a liberality hardly warranted by its means, it has given to almost every one of our diocesan training schools. That the trained master or mistress would prove incomparably superior to the untrained, might reasonably have been anticipated: and experience has fully justified the anticipation. That there may be, and are, individual exceptions to this distinction, I willingly admit; but they are only exceptions, bright, but rare.

In the third place, the Society has done, and is doing, very much for the improvement of the means, and machinery, through which the work of our National Schools is carried on. This it has done chiefly through the agency of a valuable class of officers attached to it, known under the name of Organising Masters; intelligent and experienced men, whose business it is to put into order, and remodel, and thus to render more effective, the schools where their services are needed, and desired. Many such schools there must always be. Truly it is said, in one of the Society's reports, that, "in the great majority of parishes, the services of a person whose eye is able to detect faults of arrangement in the schoolroom, who is qualified to give an opinion upon the books and school-materials

used for the purposes of instruction, and who, from his experience, can impart many useful practical hints to teachers, must be of very high importance." And not less truly is it said also, that "the services of these officers are, without exception, gratefully acknowledged by those managers of schools who have employed them." A most satisfactory instance of which there is, at this present time, in my own diocese.

Yet further, the Society has a Depository for the sale of books (carefully prepared in a gradually-ascending series, and excellently adapted to their purpose by attractiveness, as well as by intrinsic value), and of every kind of apparatus necessary for the effectual working of schools. To the usefulness of this Depository the steadily advancing increase of its issues bears incontrovertible testimony.

While engaged in this detail, I must not omit to mention the Society's Monthly Paper; which has a circulation of many thousand copies; and which contains not only a record of the proceedings of the Society, and of other educational boards, but also a multiplicity of information, (much of it in the form of letters from persons actually engaged in the work of education) which cannot fail to be of interest and use to the promoters, and managers, and teachers of schools.

But we should do scanty justice to the merits of the Society, if we were to measure them by its own immediate agency, and not to take into the account the effects of its example, its encouragement, and its assistance, in other quarters: for it has called into action, and helped, and directed aright, an amount of individual zeal and liberality which cannot be estimated. It has been instrumental in establishing boards of education (most of them having training institutions of their own) in almost every diocese. It has given countenance and aid to the plans, now so generally adopted, for the purely Church-inspection of Church-schools by inspectors acting under the sanction of the bishops of the several dioceses. Nay more, is it too much to say, that the Society, by bearing continual witness to the importance of national education, has brought into the field an agency more powerful than its own, because supplied with much larger means from the national purse, the agency of the Committee of Council on Education? How mightily this agency has worked, and is working, we can none of us be ignorant. And if it do not work beneficially for the Church, the blame, I am bold to say, must rest with ourselves.

Has, then, this agency superseded, or ought it to supersede,

that of the Society? By no means. There is an ample field open for both to labour in, not in jealous rivalry, but in harmonious co-operation. Much as the Committee of Council is doing for the education of the people, there is much more that it leaves undone. There are very many schools, in our agricultural parishes, which its Inspectors never visit; very many which are not in a condition to receive any benefit from the funds intrusted to the Committee by Parliament.

Has the Society's zeal been abated, or its efforts been relaxed? It is not so. During the very last year, it helped (according to the means placed at its disposal) to build schools capable of containing 20,000 scholars; it sent out 193 trained teachers; it gave full employment to its Organising Masters; it enlarged its Depository; it caused the establishment of many branch depositories; it received for the sale of books and of other school-apparatus a sum amounting to more than 13,000*l.*, and considerably larger than in any former year.

The Society, then, is still carrying on, and we trust will continue to carry on, with undiminished vigour and success, under the Divine blessing, its holy warfare against ignorance, and vice, against error, and ungodliness. It is still bearing aloft the banner of truth, and earnestly "contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." As the representative, and the voice, of the Church, while teachers of all kinds are offering their lessons, some of them questionable, some of them mischievous, to the rising generation, the Society is ever repeating the Psalmist's invitation, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me; *I* will teach you the fear of the Lord." While many treacherous and misleading lights are abroad, the Society is ever impressing upon the people the solemn caution of their Lord, "Take heed that the light that is in you be not darkness." God forbid that this warning voice should ever be silent, or unheard, among us!

Sure I am then that a society so principled, and so working, ought not to be crippled in its operations by a want of that pecuniary support which it may well claim, if not from every Christian, at least from every Churchman. Sure I am that the actual amount of its receipts is miserably unworthy of a nation which is certainly the richest, and boasts itself to be the most enlightened, and the most religious, in the world.

But at this time more especially, the Society has a right to ask, and to expect, the free-will offerings of the Church in a fuller mea-

sure than heretofore ; for it has been deprived, as you know, of the periodical supply which it received, for so many years, through the Queen's Letter ; and which may be estimated as equivalent to an annual income of 9000*l*.

When the countenance of the State has been thus withdrawn from it, is there not the more need that the countenance of the Church should shine upon it brightly and beneficially? We would fain hope indeed that the falling away of the one may provoke the other to a godly jealousy ; and that thus (as it often comes to pass, in the course of God's good providence) what seems to be a loss, may eventually prove a gain. We have a remarkable and a very encouraging instance of this in the financial history of another and a kindred society.

But there is yet another reason why the liberality of the Church should be freely extended to the Society, in this crisis of its affairs. Public opinion, both in and out of Parliament, has strongly pronounced against any scheme of general education that would supersede the parochial care, and check the individual zeal and beneficence, under which our Church-schools have hitherto sprung up, and grown, and brought forth fruit.

There is now, therefore, special need of the Society's instrumentality to supply any deficiencies, either in extent, or quality, which may be imputed to those schools : that so no occasion may be given to an interference which we are persuaded would go far to destroy the good spirit which is working in this way among us ; and would in fact retard, instead of accelerating the progress of sound education.

I trust then that you, friends and brethren, will show yourselves to-day, by evidence that cannot be mistaken, to be among those who fully understand, and freely acknowledge, the strength of the Society's claims ; who know that the well-being, both temporal and spiritual, both individual and national, of the great body of our people (whether belonging to the dense masses of our towns, or to the scattered inhabitants of our villages), depends mainly, so far as we can influence it, upon the teaching, and the training, that they may receive in childhood ; and who feel, that upon every one of us it is incumbent to do what in him lies to make that teaching, and training, not a curse, but a blessing.

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